
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statewide Salmon Strategy

The health of wild¹ steelhead, salmon, and trout resources is currently receiving considerable scrutiny along the Pacific coast of North America. The decline of many species has long been identified in status reviews and is increasingly reflected in the listing of species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). An understanding of the problem, solutions, and a commitment of all citizens to change is needed to improve the health of fish resources that are so fundamentally important to the quality of life in the Pacific Northwest.

The state of Washington is currently in the process of developing a statewide strategy to protect and restore wild steelhead, salmon, and trout species. In May of 1997, Governor Gary Locke and other state officials signed a Memorandum of Agreement creating the Joint Natural Resources Cabinet (Joint Cabinet). The Joint Cabinet is comprised of state agency directors or their equivalents from a wide variety of agencies whose activities and constituents influence Washington's natural resources. The purpose of the Joint Cabinet is to provide leadership in developing and implementing coordinated statewide strategies that move aggressively toward achieving all elements of the Cabinet's vision. Elements of this vision include natural resources and quality of life, statewide management strategies and partnerships, watershed management, ESA response, and the Columbia/Snake River system.

The goal of the Joint Cabinet is to “*restore healthy salmon, steelhead, and trout populations and improve those habitats on which the fish rely.*” This goal and steps to address it were outlined in January, 1998 in an initial draft of the Joint Cabinet's State Salmon Strategy framework (Appendix 1). The Joint Cabinet's objective is to develop and implement a coordinated and aggressive statewide strategy to address the goal in concert with maintenance of a healthy economy in the state. The strategy outlines central themes, guiding principles, an approach involving statewide, regional, and watershed-level roles and responsibilities, and key issues that must be addressed. The four central themes in the strategy are:

- We need to determine our own future
- We must make tough choices
- We must undertake significant effort and provide adequate funding
- We are all in this together

¹ Wild refers to a stock that is sustained by natural spawning and rearing in the natural habitat, regardless of parentage (includes native)(WDFW 1997a).

In September of 1997, a Government Council on Natural Resources (GCNR) was convened to provide a forum for discussion, coordination, information sharing, and partnering among the governmental entities which have varying roles and responsibilities in developing and implementing comprehensive natural resource strategies. In addition to the Joint Cabinet, participants in the GCNR include representatives from Indian tribes, county and city governments, the legislature, and federal agencies. All parties acknowledge the need to develop effective communication and outreach strategies to involve other stakeholders and citizens in natural resource issues.

Lower Columbia Steelhead and the Endangered Species Act

On July 30, 1996 the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) proposed several steelhead Evolutionarily Significant Units (ESUs) in Washington for listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). On August 9, 1996 the background and rationale for NMFS' proposed rule, as well as subsequent administrative steps, were summarized in the Federal Register (61 FR 41541). Additional technical documentation was provided in the NMFS Biological Review Team report (Busby et al. 1996) and in other related NMFS documents (NMFS 1996a; 1996b). Steelhead in the Lower Columbia River ESU, which contains stocks in Washington ranging from the Cowlitz to the Wind rivers, and in Oregon from the lower Willamette to the Hood rivers, were proposed for listing as "threatened." Official threatened status means that steelhead in the ESU are declining and headed toward "endangered" status. Endangered status means that the fish comprising an ESU are in grave danger of extinction.

Following issuance of their proposed rule for West Coast steelhead, NMFS determined that substantial scientific disagreement existed regarding the sufficiency and accuracy of data relevant to the final listing determinations for several ESUs, including the Lower Columbia ESU (62 FR 43974). Thus, the deadline for NMFS to make a final listing determination for the Lower Columbia ESU was extended for six-months from August 11, 1997 to February 9, 1998. The February deadline was subsequently delayed from two to six weeks.

In general, and specifically for lower Columbia steelhead, the extent to which effective conservation strategies, actions, and longer term commitments can be developed and confidently enacted or planned prior to the date of final NMFS deadlines is significant, since actual listing determinations are potentially avoidable. However, it is very important to note that even if an ESU is listed, the state and local effort put forth in developing conservation initiatives before listing will support NMFS' development of special regulations, or 4(d) rules, and will ultimately provide the foundation for relying on state and local responsibilities in later recovery planning processes that are legally required of NMFS under the ESA.

Lower Columbia Steelhead Conservation Initiative

A part of the Joint Cabinet's agenda under the salmon strategy includes development of a comprehensive *Lower Columbia Steelhead Conservation Initiative* (LCSCI) to address protection and restoration of wild steelhead in the lower Columbia River area. It is important to note that although this draft of the Initiative currently emphasizes steelhead, other salmon and trout species are also at risk in the lower Columbia area and are now undergoing federal review for potential listing under the ESA. Chum and fall chinook salmon were proposed for listing as "threatened" by NMFS on February 26, 1998, and a final determination for Columbia River bull trout is expected from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in June, 1998. Therefore, the initiative should be viewed as an evolving regional framework to address both steelhead and other species as appropriate in the lower Columbia area. Initial material on these species is included in this draft - more information in the future will be included as ESA decisions and responses proceed.

Advance work on the Lower Columbia Steelhead Conservation Initiative prior to May, 1997 was performed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), which emphasized harvest and hatchery issues and conservation measures. Coincident with creation of the Joint Cabinet, conservation planning was expanded to include major involvement by other state agencies, local governments, NMFS, and stakeholders to fully address habitat and tributary dam/hydropower components.

The State of Oregon is preparing a steelhead restoration plan that will complement the LCSCI for lower Columbia River steelhead. Their plan, termed the Steelhead Supplement to the Oregon Plan (SSOP) will build on the foundation and format of the recently completed Oregon Coastal Salmon Restoration Initiative (OCSRI; State of Oregon 1997). The OCSRI was the basis of the recent decision by NMFS not to list coho salmon in the northern Oregon coastal ESU under the ESA. The joint efforts of Washington and Oregon toward a comprehensive strategy for steelhead planning and restoration in the lower Columbia River are key opportunities to benefit wild steelhead resources in federal ESA processes and state and local responses.

Washington's state and tribal fish managers have long been committed to a wide range of activities related to the conservation and restoration of wild salmonid resources (e.g., as noted in NMFS 1996a). One of these, directed at salmon and steelhead, was the formulation of the Wild Stock Restoration Initiative (WSRI), to complement and bolster ongoing programs to protect stock health and habitat. The goal of that initiative is to *"Maintain and restore healthy wild salmon and steelhead stocks and their habitats in order to support the region's fisheries, economies, and other societal values."*

Subsequent to the WSRI, WDFW and appropriate Indian tribes were asked to develop a broad policy framework for all wild salmonids consistent with legislation passed in 1993 (Second Engrossed House Bill 1309). This framework, termed the Wild Salmonid Policy (WSP), was developed in compliance with the State Environmental Policy Act. A final environmental impact statement (FEIS) was produced in September, 1997. The

Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted the Wild Salmonid Policy and additional staff guidance in December, 1997. Resolution of some policy components and approaches between WDFW and tribes is continuing. The stated goal of the draft WSP is to *protect, restore, and enhance the productivity, production, and diversity of wild salmonids and their ecosystems to sustain ceremonial, subsistence, commercial, and recreational fisheries; non-consumptive fish benefits; and related cultural and ecological values.*[@] The WSP will have considerable influence on comprehensive and regional-based protection and restoration efforts for Washington's salmonids, particularly in relation to fisheries management. The LCSCI, as now drafted, is consistent with the WSP and will be updated as new WSP policy and implementation information becomes available.

The utility of the LCSCI is to describe concepts, strategies, opportunities, and commitments to action that are important to protect and restore the diversity and long term productivity of steelhead (and other salmonid species) in the lower Columbia River for future generations. The LCSCI addresses a range of concerns including natural production and genetic conservation, recreational harvest and opportunity, hatchery strategies, habitat protection and restoration goals, monitoring of stock status and habitat health, and evaluation of the effectiveness of specific conservation actions. It also addresses improved enforcement of regulations and strategies for outreach and education.

Throughout the LCSCI an attempt has been made to identify biologically meaningful short-term (**Phase 1**) and long-term (**Phase 2**) measures for steelhead conservation and restoration. Phase 1 activities are those that can be accomplished using existing authorities and budgetary resources, whereas implementation of Phase 2 activities will require additional resources. It is important to note that delineation of phases does not connote implementation priority. A framework for prioritization of actions is provided in Chapter 12. The LCSCI has three areas of emphasis: (1) broad and effective conservation strategies and performance standards, (2) more specific and reportable measurable conservation actions, and (3) monitoring and evaluation.

Monitoring and evaluation represent key components of the management of the LCSCI. Monitoring and evaluation of stock status and habitat health as well as the effectiveness of strategies and measures are needed to understand how well individual and cumulative actions contribute to the protection and restoration of wild steelhead, and to enable rational adjustments in direction and effort to be made. Also, a key aspect of monitoring involves implementation monitoring, to track the extent to which proposed strategies and actions are actually implemented, and to ensure that appropriate information is available for informed decision-making.

It is important to note that the LCSCI must evolve and change over time as new information becomes available. The present draft has resulted from considerable effort that has continued since 1996. Initial WDFW staff work and public comments were received during scoping meetings held in Southwest Washington in November, 1996, and January and June, 1997. Material related to habitat protection and restoration was added by the agencies of the Joint Cabinet in 1997. A Pre-Draft of the LCSCI was prepared in

November, 1997 which provided an initial framework and emphasized state conservation actions. The Pre-Draft was made available to the Government Council of Natural Resources, NMFS, and others for review and was outlined in a series of public meetings in the LCSCI area in December, 1997. Comments received on the Pre-draft were used to develop this first formal Draft, including major contributions from local governments in the LCSCI area.

Continued refinement of short and longer term commitments will occur through ongoing public and stakeholder review and input processes, and coordination with the state of Oregon, tribes, and other government entities, including NMFS. These input and coordination processes will play a key role in determining the extent to which the eventual conservation package will benefit wild steelhead and other species. **Restoration will not be successful with the efforts of the state or federal government alone; broad participation from all levels of government and stakeholders will be required.**

Subsequent planning steps will include refinement of approaches regarding specific performance measures for objectives, action plans and accountability, timelines, costs, and funding. Additional information on these elements will be incorporated into subsequent LCSCI documents. Where appropriate and feasible, efforts will continue to be made to implement appropriate actions immediately, to expedite essential conservation priorities. In the coming months, a comprehensive conservation action plan will be developed, initial conservation measures will have begun, and ongoing and new monitoring elements will be increasingly integrated and implemented. As this draft was being prepared, the Washington Legislature was considering several bills and a supplemental budget that would have a bearing on the direction and substance of the LCSCI.

Again, it is important to emphasize that although the focus of the LCSCI is on steelhead, other salmonids in the lower Columbia River area are also known to be at risk and will be the subjects of upcoming ESA listing proposals and broader consideration under the state salmon strategy framework. Key species include lower Columbia River chum and chinook salmon, and coastal cutthroat and bull trout. At this time it is not clear to what extent lower Columbia River coho salmon will be considered under the ESA. Regardless, future management activities may include establishment of goals for efforts to reintroduce naturally spawning populations. It is intended that the framework afforded by the LCSCI for steelhead will also provide a strong foundation from which to build coordinated protection and restoration strategies for these, and other species as needed in the LCSCI area. Efforts to protect and restore species in the LCSCI area will also provide involved parties with important experience and learning. This learning can be used immediately to develop comprehensive but focused responses to restoration needs in other areas of Washington.

Last but by no means least, the fate of wild steelhead, salmon, and trout is inextricably linked to the health and vitality of the human communities of the LCSCI area. State and local governments as well as tribes, federal agencies and non-governmental organizations recognize the multitude of complex connections between healthy ecosystems and the

impacts imposed on them by the robust economic and social activities of normal human life. This restoration plan specifically addresses ecosystem health and the conservation measures that must be taken to recover wild steelhead stocks. As these steps are implemented, a wide array of other state economic and social programs will continue within the planning area so that implementation of the LCSCI fits harmoniously within the larger state strategy of assuring that population and economic growth needs are managed and the state's natural resources are protected.